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ABSTRACT

The axiomatic functionalist approach to linguistic analysis, in which, by definition, syntactic relationships are asymmetrical and morphological relationships are symmetrical, provides the framework for a discussion of the grammatical identity of the definite article "al" in Arabic as either morphemic or syntactic. Criteria for the distinction of the two types are applied to the article, and it is concluded that "al" is a syntactic element, or plereme. (MSE)

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DEFINITENESS IN ARABIC FROM AN AXIOMATIC FUNCTIONALIST POINT OF VIEW

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DEFINITENESS IN ARABIC FROM AN AXIOMATIC FUNCTIONALIST POINT OF VIEW

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Axiomatic Functionalism, a modern approach to the analysis of language, has been originated by Mulder and Harvey, the two main figures in linguistics of St. Andrews school, Scotland. The approach in question seems, in many respects, to be an extension to Martinet's functional linguistics in France. The roots for the two approaches may be deeply rooted in the functional views of Prague school.

The term 'axiomatic' derives from the set of axioms which constitute the main elements[1] of Mulder's linguistic theory, and 'functionalism' is a fundamental notion spreading all over the theory.

Grammar according to the above approach is a system the components of which are morphology and syntax. The essential characteristic feature of syntax is that the constructional relations in it are, by definition, relations between elements that can stand in tactic asymmetrical relations to one another, whereas in morphology, constructional relations are, by definition, symmetrical.[2]

As a first step in a syntactic analysis, the investigator starts with reducing the syntagm[3] to its minimal syntactic entities which we call plaremes. This operation is mainly, if not entirely, dependent on the distinction between morphology and syntax, which is basic to the present approach. In an article called "Pseudo-Composites and Pseudo-words", Harvey and Mulder lay down certain criteria for the identification of morphological complexes as opposed to syntactic ones. The four major criteria in that article are:

1. A morphological complex must be a potential constituent.
2. A morphological complex must contain, at least, two signs; otherwise it is not a complex on the sign level.
3. A morphological complex should have as its constituents only simple signs, i.e. all immediate constituents of a morphological complex must, at the same time, be its ultimate constituents.

4. The members of a morphological complex must all stand in a relation of simultaneity to one another in the complex in question.

To investigate the grammatical identity of the definite article "al" in Arabic, the complex alkitāb (the book) is taken for analysis. On applying the above four criteria the following observations are made:

1. The complex alkitāb (the book) can be shown to be a potential constituent in higher constructions as in:

alkitābu aljadidu - "the new book"
alkitābu jadidun - "the book is new"

2. Commuting al (the) with zero we get kitāb (a book); and kitāb with qalam (a pen), we get alqalam (the pen). These commutations show that the complex alkitāb is a combination of two simple signs; and this satisfies the second criterion.

3. Being unable to identify more than one simple sign in each of al (the) and kitāb (book), we may say that the two signs form the immediate, and at the same time, the ultimate constituents of alkitāb (the book); and this satisfies the third criterion.

4. The fourth and last criterion demands that a morphological complex should not have any potential for tolerating syntactic relations. To test whether we can find a syntactic relation within the boundaries of the complex in question we first apply the simple technique of "permutation". The result would be kitabal which does not constitute a well-formed[4] construction in Arabic. Having failed, via permutation, to discover a syntactic relation within the complex under analysis we resort to the other equally important technique of "commutation". This involves discovering a constituent which can validly[5] commute with either al (the), or kitāb (book). If within the boundaries of the new commutant a possibility of a potential of elements standing in a tactic asymmetrical relation is discovered, one has actually demonstrated that the complex alkitāb is syntactic. On the other hand, if the new commutant involves a grammatical complexity (morphological or syntactic) then this would implicitly

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lead to violating the third criterion (i.e. the immediate constituents of a morphological complex should themselves be the ultimate ones). The commutation of al (the), by aurāq (papers), to get aurāqu kitāb (papers of a book), would be termed invalid since the new commutant is not mutually exclusive with al. On the other hand, if we leave al constant and commute kitāb (book), by qalam wa dafter (a pen and a note-book), we find it inadequate to consider the new commutant an immediate constituent alongside with al. Added to this the fact that the commutable elements are, again, not mutually exclusive. Having applied the aforementioned criteria and failed to discover an asymmetrical relation within the complex under investigation we are in a position to support our earlier hypothesis that the complex alkitāb (the book), is a morphological one consisting of the monemes (morphemes) al (the), and kitāb (book).

Further investigation shows that the occurrence of al before an adjective, a numeral and a supplement that are sub-ordinated to a definite nominal is, in fact, determined by the definiteness of that nominal. In other words they are contextually determined rather than functional. Omitting al from the nominal itself would make the sub-ordinated elements automatically lose their al's. It should be noted that a noun does not acquire definiteness only via al, but also by some other means like being modified by a possessive as in kitābi (my book), kitābu sadīqī (my friend's book), or kitābu asdiqā?i alθalāθa (my three friends' book).

The adjective, numeral and supplement which stand in a sub-ordinative relation with respect to a nominal may themselves acquire al's by virtue of the definiteness of the nominal. This is shown by the following example:

alkutubu alθalāθa alkabīra al mawḍūda ᶜala altāwila
(the three big books on the table)[6]

The loss of al's before the modifying elements obtains by subtracting the definite article al from the nominal. Thus using kutub instead of alkutub would give:

kutubun θalāθa kabīra mawḍūda ᶜala altāwila
(three big books on the table)

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Similar considerations regarding the presence and absence of al's before the peripheral sub-ordinated elements would apply if the nominal itself is modified by a possessive as in:

kutubu ṣadīqī alθalāθa alkabīra almawfūda ᶜala alṭāwila
(my friend's three big books on the table)

The absence of ṣadīqī (my friend), which provides definiteness to the noun kutub (books), and consequently to the peripheral elements sub-ordinated to it would cause those sub-ordinated elements to lose their al's:

kutubun θalāθa kabīra mawfūda ᶜala al-ṭāwila
(three big books on the table)

The construction kutubu ʔaṣdiqāʔi alθalāθa (my three friend's books) seems to involve certain points which make us reconsider our earlier hypothesis about the grammatical identity of the definite article al. Looking deeply in the problem we find in:

	alkutub	(the books)
and	kutubu aṣdiqāʔi alθalāθa	(my three friend's books)

that al (the) and ʔaṣdiqāʔi alθalāθa (my three friends) are mutually exclusive. The latter commutant clearly involves a grammatical complexity, namely a syntactic one. The construction in question is analysable into two immediate constituents:

kutubu / ʔṣdiqāʔi alθalāθa
my three friend's / books

This, in effect, means that the immediate constituents are not themselves the ultimate ones; and this violates the third criterion for identifying grammatical complexes and consequently leads to the refutation of the hypothesis that al is a morphological element (i.e. a morpheme). Instead, the hypothesis[7] that al is a syntactic element (pleremе) will have to be adopted.

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Footnotes

1. The other complementary statements of the theory are definitions whose purpose is to clarify new and vague terms in the axioms and the definitions themselves. Theorms are yet other theoretical statements that may be deduced from the set of axioms and definitions in the theory.

2. Symmetrical relations in morphology imply relations of simultaneity. A complex such as "cats" in English would be regarded morphological as the relation between the signs "cat" and "plural" is simultaneous (unordering). Similar consideration apply to "went" and "walked", each of which is regarded a simultaneous bundle of two morphemes. That is to say whether we regard "went" a bundle of "to go" + "past" or "past" + "to go" would not bring about a functional difference.

   Asymmetrical relation, on the other hand, implies ordering relation. This is tested by "permutation" as in:

The bus station	or	Jack hit Paul
or The station bus	and	Paul hit Jack

   There is a clear functional (relevant to communication) difference between the two. It can also be tested by commutation as clarified by the discussion below.

3. A syntagm in Mulder's theory corresponds to the sentence base which may be interpreted as the total complex of those features which correspond to tactic entities. In more common terms, it is a syntactic construction with no prosodic features.

4. 'well-formedness' implies being functional, i.e. separately relevant to communication; and this further implies that the construction should have the potential to stand as an immediate constituent in a higher complex.

5. For the validity of commutation emphasis should be laid on the fact that the commutable elements should mutually exclude one another in an equivalent context without affecting the well-formedness of the constituents of the complex.

6. A more literal translation would be: (the three big books that exist on the table).

7. Our final descriptive statements remain, in view of the present approach, hypotheses which may be refuted if the facts in the data prove them wrong.